

# MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

## OREGON COUNTY

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In 1847 the Oregon County Court ordered a 20-foot-square, hewn-log courthouse of two stories to be built in Thomasville, the first county seat of Oregon County. John R. Woodside served as superintendent. The two-story building, erected on the square, cost about \$140. Specifications recorded in the county record are reprinted in Lewis A. W. Simpson's book, *Oregon County's Three Flags*, and a drawing illustrates the description.

When the county seat moved to Alton, the court ordered the old courthouse sold in February 1860. It brought \$105.

The court appropriated a total of \$4,550 for a courthouse to be built in Alton on the square. G. W. Reed (or Read) contracted the building and when the building was completed in August 1861 he received \$75 to cover additional finishing.

In October 1863 this courthouse was burned in a Civil War incident. At the conclusion of the war the court occupied temporary quarters in Alton. After considering building a new courthouse, the court decided to rebuild on the old foundation instead. In November 1870 the court ordered W. Huphers to draft a plan to suit the old foundation, so the designs were probably similar.

The court appropriated \$8,000 for the rebuilding in February 1871 and appointed Samuel W. Greer, a commissioner, to draw the plan and superintend the building. The court accepted Greer's plan and ordered him to advertise for bids. The commissioners gave the contract to J. F. Kidwell for \$5,795 in June 1871.

Construction apparently was underway in October

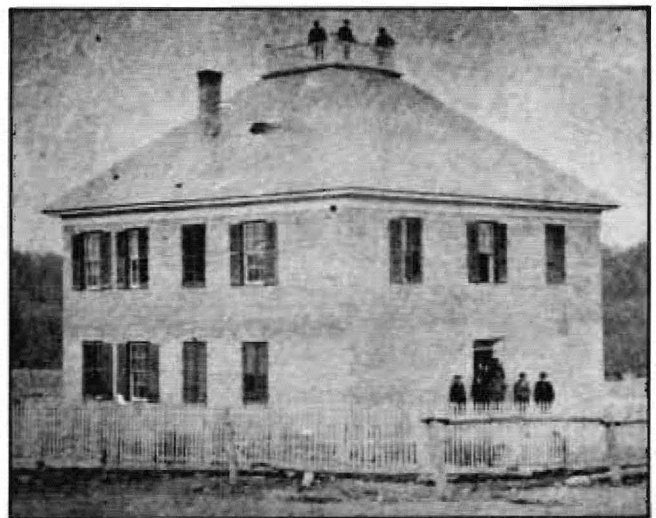
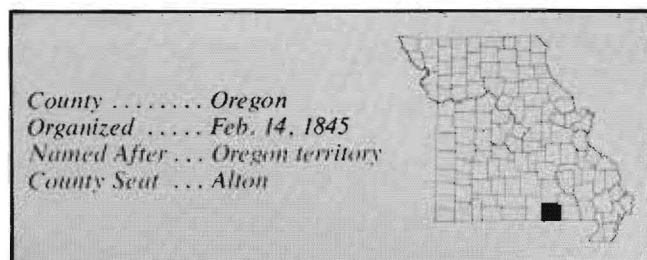


Fig. 1. Oregon County Courthouse, uncertain date.  
(From: *Oregon County's Three Flags*, 1971)



Fig. 2. Oregon County Courthouse, after 1903 remodeling.  
(From: *Oregon County's Three Flags*, 1971)



1871 after the foundation had been cleaned out. Since Fig. 1 is an undated photograph, it may be the 1861 or 1871 building. If it is the 1861 courthouse, the 1871 rebuilding may have used the segmental arches.

In March 1903 a grand jury recommended improvements, which a local paper noted were badly needed. In July 1903 the court asked contractors for bids on improvements, which included a 22-foot addition, new

roof and three fireproof vaults. W. E. Wadsworth submitted the lowest bid and filed bond. By April 1904 the work, which cost about \$5,100, was nearly completed. The old building was raised 13 inches and both old and new enclosed with a mansard roof, which created a third story (Fig. 2).

The windows with segmental arches in Fig. 2 indicate a change from the horizontal frames seen in Fig. 1. The 13-inch addition in height mentioned in a contemporary account is evident when comparing roof lines in the two illustrations.

The building of 1861, rebuilt in 1871 and enlarged with a 22-foot extension in 1903-04, was razed in October 1939 as preparations for the present courthouse began.

Because government funds were available in the 1930s, Oregon County took steps to build a new courthouse by authorizing bonds amounting to \$25,000 in January 1939. A Work Projects Administration grant for almost \$75,000 brought the total to about \$100,000.

The court secured plans from Earl Hawkins, a Springfield architect, for a three-story building with offices on the first floor and the sides of the second. The courtroom occupied the center of the second and third stories. On the sides of the third story were the jail and a local lodge.

Oregon County citizens preferred using local stone, but Ironton red granite was finally chosen since it cost less than quarrying native Oregon County stone. The court received the building from the W. P. A. in February 1942 (Fig. 3).

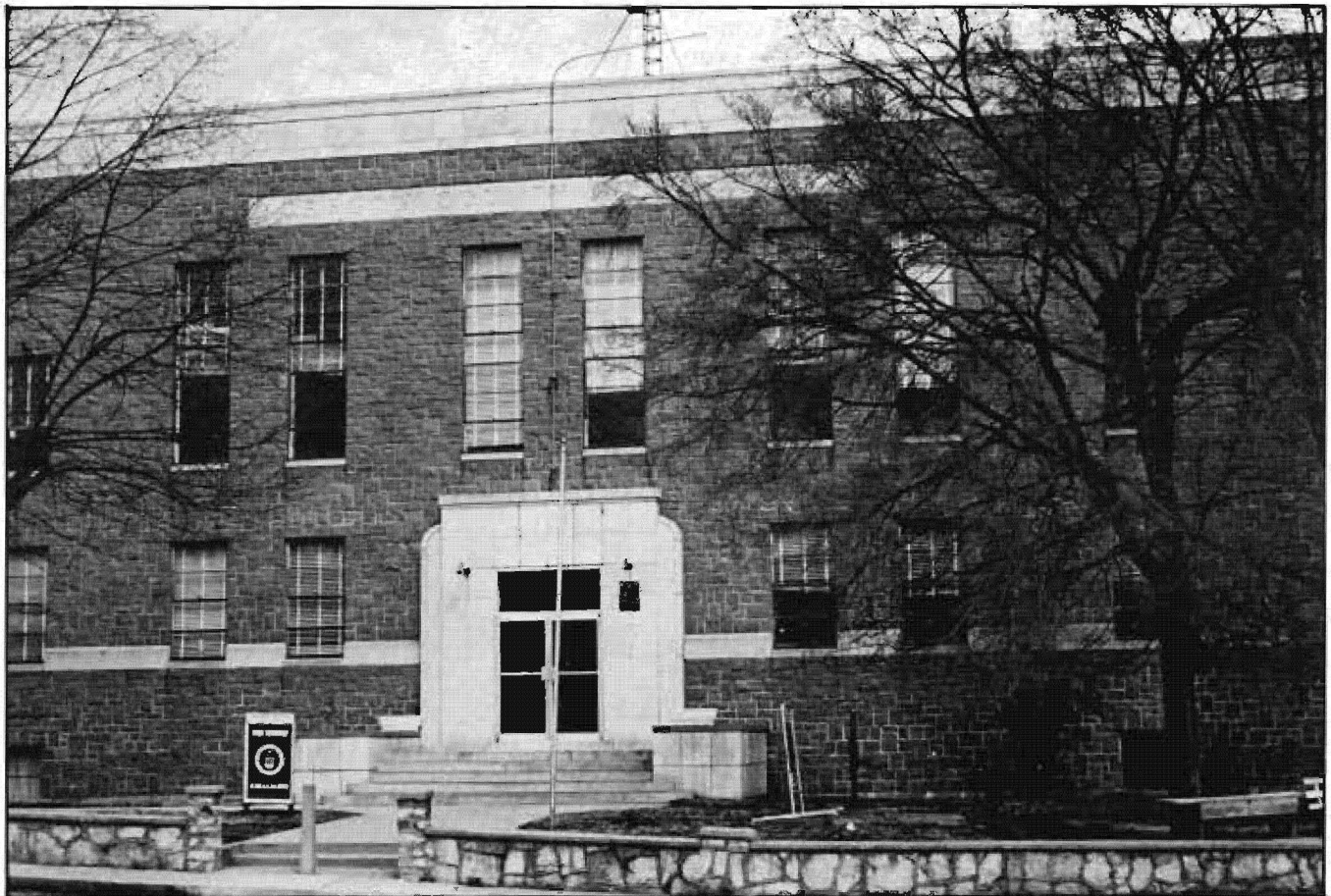


Fig. 3. Oregon County Courthouse, 1939-. Architect: Earl Hawkins

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